Rev. William McCutchen Morrison, D.D.

A prince among the great missionaries of modern times

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William McCutchen Morrison
1867-1918

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The Bible is largely made up of the biographies of the great men of old. As we meditate upon the record of their lives we are warned by their failures, encouraged by their successes, and inspired by their lofty examples. But we do not have to look to the Bible alone to find men whose lives are an encouragement and an inspiration to us. Here is the picture of a man who lived in our own day and generation, and whose name will live forever in the annals of great Christian heroes.

The Young Man

William McCutchen Morrison was born on a farm near Lexington, Va., on November 10, 1867, of pious and godly parents. His father was James Luther Morrison and his mother was Mary Agnes McCutchen, both of Scotch Presbyterian stock. Their children were reared in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and Dr. Morrison became a Christian when he was a young man and thus dedicated the best part of his life to God. He was educated in the common schools of the community and graduated from Washington and Lee Univer-

sity with high honors at the early age of twenty. It was his intention to study law, and so he taught school in order to make enough money to complete his education.

The Great Decision

But the same God that called Moses and Paul from their chosen profession to a higher and nobler calling had other plans for the life of Morrison. He decided to study for the ministry, and took his theological training in the Seminary at Louisville, Ky. He then sought the place where he could invest his life to the greatest advantage, and, in the providence of God, his attention was directed to Africa. He volunteered, was accepted, and, after a journey of many months, full of dangers, difficulties, sickness, and disappointment, he reached Luebo early in 1897.

A New Name

The first thing the missionary to Africa must acquire is a new name, because the natives cannot pronounce our English names. Shortly after his arrival Dr. Morrison settled a dispute between two villages whose inter-tribal wars had cut off communication with Luebo. Having opened communication, the natives said to him: "Don't let the path get closed again." And so he was always called "Kuonyi Nshila." This was a prophecy of what he was to accomplish, because he ever strove to keep open the path between man and man, and also between man and God. Morrison kept open the path that Lapsley found.

The Scholar

When Dr. Morrison reached Luebo, the language of the people there had not been reduced to writing, although his predecessors had blazed the trail in this direction. The language of the people had reached a high state of development, but to master its details and formulate a grammar was a task to challenge the keenest intellect and the most gifted linguist. Morrison set himself to the accomplishment of this task with that resolute determination so characteristic of him, and in a few years his Grammar and Dictionary were ready for publication. He also prepared many school books, religious tracts, and translated large portions of the Scriptures into the language.

He Chooses a Companion

While at home on his first furlough, after six years of exacting labor on the field, he was united in marriage with Miss Bertha Marion Stebbins, of Gueydan, La., and she became his faithful companion and helpmeet not only in the home, but also in his missionary labors.

He Champions the Cause of the Oppressed

The one thing that contributed so much to the success of Dr. Morrison as a missionary was his love for the people among whom he labored. "He judged the native by the best that was in him, not by the worst." He knew their weakness and their childlike nature, and for any one to oppress them or treat them unjustly—every fiber of his being rebelled against it. The manner

in which King Leopold of Belgium and his agents oppressed the natives of the Congo is now known to all the world. But this is the picture of the man who, first of all, lifted up his voice against those cruelties and was largely responsible for bringing those crimes to the attention of the civilized world. It required no small amount of courage to protest against the despotic autocrat of the Congo, for his power was absolute and his word was law. But one look into the face of this man, to see those wonderful eyes flash with indignation, and to see those jaws set like steel, would convince you that he had a courage and conviction born of God and knew no fear.

King Leopold soon realized that he must reckon with this man, or else he must face the contempt and odium of the civilized world. Dr. Morrison exposed the atrocities which a commercial company perpetrated on the natives, and this company sued him for libel. King Leopold owned the controlling interest in this company, and he appointed the judges that were to try the case. Small hope for justice under such conditions. But the ablest lawyer in Belgium volunteered to defend Dr. Morrison. The result was that the company was morally condemned and Dr. Morrison was gloriously acquitted.

The Missionary Statesman

From the very beginning of his work till the day of his death Dr. Morrison was the recognized leader of the Mission. His policies became the policies of the Mission. Knowing that Africa must be evangelized by

her own people, he put his very lifeblood into the training of native leaders. This confidence which he placed in the natives, coupled with the responsibility he laid upon them, is largely responsible for the development of the strong leaders among them today. He was also an encouragement and an inspiration to all his fellow missionaries, and our lives have been made richer and fuller by our association with him.

Not only did he hold the place of leadership on his own mission, but he came to be regarded as the leader of all the Protestant missions working in the Congo. He was elected president of Conference of Protestant Missions and was entrusted with the responsibility of formulating all their policies.

His Death

But God had prepared him for a higher service, and on March 14, 1918, he was called to the assembly of the church of the firstborn and the spirits of just men made perfect.

His Character

What was the secret of this great life, and why does he stand so high in the estimation of those who knew him best? It was because he dedicated his entire life to God and kept back nothing for the service of self. He possessed many talents, but he traded with them and gained other talents which he laid at the Master's feet.

The most beautiful thing in his character was his prayer life. He began every day with prayer, and never undertook anything without asking God's guidance. He lived in

an atmosphere of prayer. He carried the burdens of his own heart, the trials and temptations of his friends, and his hopes and aspirations for the native Christians before the throne of grace.

An Appeal

Does not the life of this man inspire us to invest our lives where they will count the most? He gained much because he gave much. How much are you willing to give?

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